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Wise Men at the Zoo

"Today I am going to lecture on confusion. I'm all for it."
—Theodore Roethke

It was a zoo alright, menthol
And eucalyptus; and there was snow

And there was sleep, of course,
If not love in sweet hibernation.

The morphine was confused,
Not I. Passing stones, I

Was not quite finished
Passing stones.

Surprising as old wise men can be,
He pointed out the woman,

Just like that: without anatomy
There is no criticism.

In front of the cage, she stood.
But how could he contour beauty

Through the sediments of winter clothes,
The amnesia of quilted coats?

She turned around and smiled,
She really wanted that tiger

To believe freedom was on our side.
The wind was swallowing her words,

The mesh was rusty and frozen.
I was uneasy I think, like a Mennonite

At a dance. In a later dream
She was a falconer

And she could tell time
By the grip of the bird.

I did not take the momentary experience
For the half-understood incantation,

I did not take the spirit
For the sign of romance.

A final dream hatched
When you were on your own

And what could your mentor do?
Your chest was tight, the mucus

Rose in your throat and your lungs;
Your lungs pulled the Houdini act.

I couldn't go on. The growing pain
Smashed against my ribcage

And flew out of my chest.
She spoke again, ignored by men

And tigers. Her lips were cold and dark,
I felt the beat of a dove's heart

Descending to my wrist with a kiss
Of hyacinth and anesthesia.

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